

By Robbie Evans

Youth Services Office of Juvenile Justice Deputy Secretary, Mary L. Livers, tours Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe on Wednesday. She toured the campus and spoke with employees and youths. / Ben Corda / The News-Star

Louisiana's Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe will see some major changes next year after a new juvenile corrections facility is opened in Columbia, according to the state's top juvenile justice official.



Mary Livers, deputy undersecretary for the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, said the opening of a new 48-bed facility in Columbia will allow Swanson to significantly reduce the number of juveniles in its dorms, which aids in their rehabilitation. Livers made her comments during a visit to Swanson on Wednesday.

The reduction in the number of juveniles in each dorm will allow Swanson's staff to work closer with the juveniles and improve rehabilitation outcomes. Livers said the reduction is part of an ongoing effort by the agency to change the culture of the state's juvenile justice system from a corrections model to a therapeutic model, which calls for more direct contact, instruction and mentoring between Swanson's staff and juveniles. "The next step is the opening of the Columbia facility," Livers said. "When we do that, we will be able to decrease the dorm size from 16 to 12, which helps us maintain a good learning environment for the kids."

The Columbia facility is expected to be opened later this year or early next year, Livers said.

Swanson has also begun efforts to involve its juveniles in mentoring programs and community projects in recent years to help in rehabilitation efforts. Swanson Director Carolyn Atkins said the facility has begun a mentoring program with Grambling State University's Criminal Justice Department to provide its juveniles with role models. The facility also has entered an agreement with the Ouachita Parish Police Jury to allow the juveniles to help in beautification efforts of the aging J.S. Clark Cemetery in southern Monroe to encourage a sense of community responsibility in them, as well as working with the Habitat for Humanity organization in building homes.